USDA NRCS

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Conservation Across America

Pasture Planting

Job Sheet – 512

Photo from Forages 5th Ed. CD Companion

Tifton 85 Bermudagrass

Tifton 85 Hybrid Bermudagrass. This is the latest variety to come from Dr. Glenn Burton's breeding program at the Coastal Plain Station at Tifton, Georgia. It has larger stems, broader leaves and a darker green color than other bermudagrass varieties. It is more digestible than Coastal and has produced both higher hay yield and animal weight gain than Coastal. In a Texas test it produced higher average daily gain and more total live weight gain per acre than Coastal. Hay producers should be aware that, because of its larger stems and higher yield, it may take more time for this grass to cure (dry) as compared to some of the older varieties.

Establishment

Establishment of a bermudagrass hay field or pasture is a major expense. Producers should do all that is possible to insure success. The following suggestions may be helpful in successfully establishing bermudagrasses.

I. Site Selection and Land Preparation

(a) Choose a reasonably well-drained soil.
(b) Destroy common bermudagrass and other weeds by keeping the soil cultivated (fallow) over an extended time period, especially during dry weather. It may be preferable to spray spots of common bermudagrass with Roundup in the growing season prior to establishment.

II. Lime and Fertilization

(a) Raise soil pH to 5.5 by liming. Use dolomitic limestone if a soil test indicates a need for magnesium. If in the future you plan to overseed your bermudagrass with a small grain or ryegrass, adjust the pH to 6.0 and to 6.5 for clovers.
(b) For sandy soils, apply soil test recommended rates of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K), along with 30 lb nitrogen per acre as soon as the bermudagrass plants start to grow. Apply an additional 70 lb nitrogen per acre and one-half of the recommended potassium when stolons (runners) begin to develop.

III. Time of Planting

The improved hybrid bermudagrasses do not produce sufficient seed and must be established from vegetative plant parts. Dug sprigs, consisting of underground rhizomes, plant crowns and stolons, can be planted from Mid-January through Mid-May and again from Mid-August through Mid-October. Sprigging bermudagrass in mid to late winter before it starts growing (before breaking dormancy) is encouraged. Sprigs dug in early spring after the plants have broken dormancy will have lower levels of energy reserves. Energy reserves are needed to initiate and develop new shoots (sprouts). Also, soil moisture is usually more favorable in late winter as compared to spring (April-May). In the spring, when top growth reaches four to six inches, digging and planting of sprigs should be delayed until after the first hay harvest or harvest of tops for planting. Tops (green stems) can be planted in Mid-May through Mid-June and again in Mid-August through Mid-September depending on location. The grass should be overly mature with six weeks or more of growth when the tops are harvested for planting.

When planting tops, try to plant during a cloudy, rainy period. Moisture conditions must be ideal for this method to succeed. The soil becomes very hot during clear, bright summer days and the planting material can either dry out or "scald." This seems to be more of a problem with tops than with dug sprigs. Also, chances of success when using tops are likely greater when planting on loamy soils as compared to upland deep sands.

Young plants should be allowed plenty of time (six weeks - three months) to develop a strong root system before cold weather.

IV. Planting Material

(a) Obtain planting material (sprigs or tops) from nurseries that are pure as to variety and free from common bermudagrass or other weedy grasses.
(b) Plant fresh, pure, live sprigs or freshly cut tops that are six weeks old or older. Sprigs can be dug with a commercial sprig digger. They can also be harvested by using a spring-tooth harrow or field cultivator, along with a side-delivery rake and pitchfork. Green tops can be harvested with conventional hay equipment. Balers can be adjusted to form small bales that will weight whatever is needed for ease of handling. Green bales should be moved and planted quickly before they go through a heat.

V. Planting Rate

Plant 12 bushels (sprigging machine) or 24 bushels (broadcast, disked in, and packed) dug sprigs, or 5 - 7 bales of tops per acre.

VI. Planting Method

(a) Always plant in a well-prepared, weed-free, moist seedbed.
(b) Land that has been turned with a moldboard plow or has received other primary tillage should be smoothed with a disk harrow to destroy germinating weed seeds just ahead of the planter.
(c) Dug sprigs can be planted with commercial sprig planters that place the sprigs in the soil two to three inches deep. Tree planters and other machines have also been used. Both dug sprigs and tops can be broadcast on the surface with a spinner-type grass planter. The planting materials should be immediately pushed into the soil with a disk harrow or similar device.
(d) Pack the soil with a heavy roller so that soil capillarity can be established which will keep the soil moist around the planting material.

VII. Establishment Weed Control

Annual grasses and annual broadleaf weeds Weedmaster ® (2,4-D + dicamba) BASF 1 to 2 qts. Preemergence 7 - 10 days after planting. For use after planting vegetative propagules (sprigs) of hybrid bermudagrass. Reduced control may be expected if weeds are allowed to reach 1 inch tall before application or if germination occurs 10 days after application. Consult Weedmaster ® supplemental label for further information. For information on controlling weeds in established bermudagrass see current extension publication, B-5038, 5-99,"SUGGESTIONS FOR WEED CONTROL IN PASTURES AND FORAGES" Contact your county agricultural agent for updates on herbicide recommendations.

With sustained soil moisture, good weed control, and adequate fertility, bermudagrass can be established in three months and ready for the first hay harvest or light grazing. Late plantings should not be harvested, but allowed to go through the winter with plenty of top growth.

When a producer intends to establish a large acreage it may be wise to first establish a smaller area as a nursery. From the nursery, the producer can harvest planting material for additional plantings. This practice spreads the risk of establishment failure over more than one season.

Adapted from - New Forages and Their Establishment1C.G. Chambliss2

1In: 45th Annual Florida Beef Cattle Short Course Proceedings; 1996 May 1-3; Gainesville, FL. University of Florida (Gainesville): Animal Science Department. 80p.
2Agronomy Department; University of Florida; Gainesville, Florida.

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